

States team up for buying

BY [Dibya Sarkar](#)

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At least eight states have signed on to a cooperative purchasing contract for public safety communications services and equipment.

Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Montana, Hawaii, Alaska, Utah and Oklahoma state governments, their municipalities, school districts, and other public agencies and institutions can now buy off an agreement negotiated with nearly two dozen vendors by the Western States Contracting Alliance (WSCA). The three-year contract, which can be extended to 10 years, could be worth up to \$500 million.

Officials in another four states -- Minnesota, Arizona, Wyoming and California -- are reviewing the deal. All 50 states can buy off the contract once officials sign a participating addendum, said Guy Cranor, a senior procurement officer with the Washington state government who helped negotiate the contract.

Equipment available under the agreement includes radios, gateway devices, microwave antennas, towers, testing equipment, and other technology and communications products. EF Johnson Co., M/A-COM Inc., Alcatel, JPS Communications and SmartLink Radio Networks Inc. are among the 24 vendors in the approximately eight equipment categories.

Cranor said the process began about two years ago, when public officials said there was a need for the technology but no specific contracts. That's when WSCA stepped in, gathered experts from different levels of governmental and public safety, and issued a request for proposals.

"What we were looking at is to find and to support small local governments, smaller state agencies to get the new technology at a reasonable price and also be in a fair market when it comes to bids," he said. "A small county couldn't get some of the bigger companies to look at their bid, and so that's why we did a WSCA contract."

Participants can save money and time because WSCA evaluated the various products and services as well as the legal requirements, Cranor said. For example, consortium officials evaluated SmartLink's bid, which received a high enough score to move to the second round. A technical team composed of senior personnel from various states then conducted a two-day site visit at the company's Connecticut headquarters before giving the award.

Under this contract, SmartLink and M/A-COM are the two companies that will provide IP-based gateway devices to establish an interface between disparate radio systems. "We just think it's a great validation for the company," said Dave Rosi, SmartLink's executive vice president of sales and business development.

"We're not an approach for a black box for interoperability," he added. "We'll offer a solution for interoperability that's combined with infrastructure enhancements to form a foundation of a network, which allows growth into future technologies or standards."

Cranor said he believes the contract will be extensively used.